



THE RACCOON.

THE raccoon is found from Paraguay over nearly all the North American continent and islands. Its head bears a considerable resemblance to that of the fox, and it possesses many of the same traits of character. It bears in its countenance the expression of innocence and sagacity; but is cunning, vindictive, and bloodthirsty. Its teeth indicate a considerable adaptation for vegetable diet, but it lives chiefly on fowls, and like the weasel puts a great number to death at once, eating only the head and sucking their blood. It is said to be destructive to the sugar-cane and to the Indian corn when the ears are young and soft. It also feeds on the larvæ of insects, and on spiders, worms, and frogs; and upon the sea-coast, they visit the shore at low tide and search for crabs and shell-fish. One in the Zoological Gardens at London opened oysters with great address.

It is said to plunge its food into water before eating it, and on this account it has received the specific name *Lotor*, or washer, but in the account of five animals which were kept in a domesticated state, we observe that only one of them did this. Dr. Godman says, that "water seems to be essential to their comfort, if not of absolute necessity for the preparation of their food. I have had for some time, and at the moment of writing this have yet, a male and female raccoon in the yard. Their greatest delight appears to be dabbling in water, of which a large tub is always kept nearly full for their use. They are frequently seen sitting on the edge of this tub, very busily engaged in playing with a piece of broken china, glass, or a small cake of ice. When they have any substance which sinks, they both paddle with their fore feet with great eagerness, until it is caught, and then it is held by one, with both paws, and rubbed between them; or a struggle ensues for the possession of it, and when it is dropped the same sport is renewed. The coldest weather in the winter does not in the least deter them from thus dabbling in the water for amusement; nor has this action

much reference to their feeding, as it is performed at any time, even directly after feeding till satiated. I have frequently broken the ice on the surface of their tub, late at night, in the very coldest winter weather, and they have left their sleeping place with much alacrity, to stand paddling the fragments of ice about, with their fore legs in the water nearly up to the breast.

Indeed, these animals have never evinced the slightest dislike to cold, or suffered in any degree therefrom; they have in all weathers slept in a flour-barrel thrown on its side, with one end entirely open, and without any material of which to make a bed. They show no repugnance to being sprinkled or dashed with water, and voluntarily remain exposed to the rain or snow, which wets them thoroughly, notwithstanding their long hair, which being almost erect is not well suited to turn the rain. These racoons are very fond of each other, and express the greatest delight on meeting after having been separated for a short time, by various movements, and by hugging and rolling one another about on the ground.

My racoons are, at the time of writing this, more than a year old, and have been in captivity for six or eight months. They are very frolicsome and amusing, and show no disposition to bite or injure any one, except when accidentally trodden on. They are equally free from any disposition to injure children, as has been observed of other individuals. We frequently turn them loose in the parlour, and they appear to be highly delighted, romping with each other and the children, without doing any injury even to the youngest. Their alleged disposition to hurt children especially, may probably be fairly explained by the fact above mentioned, that they always attempt to bite when suddenly hurt, and few children touch animals without pinching or hurting them. They exhibit this spirit of retali-

ation not only to man, but when they accidentally hurt themselves against an inanimate body. I have many times been amused to observe the expression of spite with which one of them has sprung at and bit the leg of a chair or table, after knocking himself against it so as to hurt some part of his body.

These animals may be tamed while young, but as they grow to maturity, most generally become fierce and even dangerous. I have had one so tame as to follow a servant about through the house, or streets, though entirely at liberty; this was quite young when obtained, and grew so fond of human society as to complain very loudly, by a sort of chirping or whining noise, when left alone. Nothing can possibly exceed the domesticated racoon in restless and mischievous curiosity, if suffered to go about the house. Every chink is ransacked, and every article of furniture explored, and the neglect of servants to secure closet-doors is sure to be followed by extensive mischief."

The racoon is nocturnal in its habits; by day it sleeps, curled up into a sort of ball, by sitting on its hind legs and doubling the head under the body. When struck by any one, or attacked by an animal stronger than itself, it offers no resistance, but, like the hedgehog, rolls its body into the form of a ball, concealing its head and paws. The male is about fourteen inches long, the female somewhat larger, and has the markings upon her body blacker. The general colour is a blackish grey, paler on the under parts of the body, with some reddish brown intermixed on the neck, back, and sides. The tail is thickly covered with yellowish hair, and marked by five or six black rings round it. The pupils of the eyes are round, and each foot has five toes, terminated by strong curved and pointed claws. The racoon secretes a strong scented fluid, like the civet. Its skin is an article of considerable value in commerce.